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Article abstract

How was editing imagined during the transitional period, as cinema became an institution? How closely did the trade press's representation of editing, as a formal system subject to change, align with trends apparent on the screen? Did commentators of the day register editing's changing functions? To what degree can we detect an "editing consciousness" within the trade press, and how did it operate in the crucial years of 1913-17? To better answer these questions, this essay looks at the terminology that writers employed when writing about editing during these years, the advisories that they issued, and the factors that may have influenced their conceptions of editing. These observations will help us define with more precision how the industry reconciled itself to editing's ascendancy and reaffirm the uneven contours of the process of institutionalization.

Editing and the Institutionalization of Cinema, 1913-1917

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ABSTRACT

How was editing imagined during the transitional period, as cinema became an institution? How closely did the trade press's representation of editing, as a formal system subject to change, align with trends apparent on the screen? Did commentators of the day register editing's changing functions? To what degree can we detect an "editing consciousness" within the trade press, and how did it operate in the crucial years of 1913-17? To better answer these questions, this essay looks at the terminology that writers employed when writing about editing during these years, the advisories that they issued, and the factors that may have influenced their conceptions of editing. These observations will help us define with more precision how the industry reconciled itself to editing's ascendancy and reaffirm the uneven contours of the process of institutionalization.

For the institutionalization of cinema to take hold, cinema had to be enacted and understood as an integrated set of formal properties, industrial practices, reception patterns, and discursive strategies. We can now register that process of cinema's reimagination in many developments that mark the early 1910s, from the American film industry's move to the West Coast to the emergence of the star system to the development of a codified representational system defined in part by new functions for editing. But, as Charlie Keil has established in his work on these developments (Keil 2001; Keil and Stamp 2004), by deploying the term "transitional," the period of change that early cinema underwent prior to institutionalization was anything but a preordained march to the end goal of classicism.

In fact, the late transitional period, the era when institutionalization comes into its own, is marked inevitably by equivocation, inconsistency, and dissent. As such, the transitional era seems ready-made to serve as an object lesson in what Rick Altman has labelled "crisis historiography," which assumes that "each new representational technology traverses a period when contemporaries reveal a great deal of hesitation as to its identity" (2004, 16).

One can see such hesitation on display when examining the way editing was imagined during the period of cinema's institutionalization. The narrative of editing's development during the transitional period is all too familiar to us now: we recognize that its changed spatio-temporal capacities were registered in the American films made between 1908 and 1913, signalled most tellingly by the popularization of crosscutting, a technique used with increasing dexterity and dynamism by D.W. Griffith at Biograph.[1] Our familiarity with that narrative might lead us to think that the changes to editing evident at the level of filmic texts resulted in a wholesale reimagination of editing that produced ready acceptance of the continuity system by the early to mid-1910s. In fact, the process was far less straightforward than that; what one can observe by examining the trade press of the years immediately following Griffith's departure from Biograph is both a delayed response to formal changes and the very sort of indeterminacy that Altman attributes to periods of identity confusion. If editing changed its functions, rather radically, in the hands of filmmakers like Griffith during the early years of transition, how did such changes prompt those writing about cinema to reconsider editing as a formal practice? In other words, as editing moved toward codification, becoming a building block for the continuity system that would prove foundational for classical cinema, how did critics, columnists, and other trade press writers register this process? What kind of editing "consciousness," to build on an idea developed by Santiago Hidalgo (2012), is on display in their writing about editing? What words did they use to describe it? What traditions of cutting, in the sense of deletion and arrangement of material, were invoked in efforts to make sense of filmic editing? And how was editing's role in the storytelling process conceived and sanctioned (or resisted) by cinema's critical gatekeepers? The messy contours of the reception of

editing within the trade press do not alter the fact that continuity editing eventually becomes a key feature of classical filmmaking, but they do remind us that, following Altman, we must understand the *process* of institutionalization in dialectical terms.

In what follows, we will pursue three strands of inquiry that help us to understand better how the trade press attempted to make sense of editing in the crucial period of 1913 to 1917. The industry's ability to translate filmmakers' use of editing into an intelligible set of practices seems integral to the institutionalization of cinema. Perhaps not coincidentally, these attempts at defining editing coincided with early examples of theorizing the effects of editing on spectators by outside figures such as Hugo Münsterberg (1916). All such pronouncements on the representational capacities of the medium foster a more particularized notion of its identity, helping to crystallize a working notion of "cinema." First, we will examine the terminology used to describe editing during this period, highlighting which names for editing processes were preferred and what that tells us about editing consciousness at this time. Second, we will note what types of prohibitions and advisories were issued by those critics who were alert to the use of editing within films of the day. Third, we will look at the influences that likely conditioned the ways that editing was discussed and defined. Collectively, these observations will paint a portrait of an industry learning how to reconcile itself to the new fact of editing's ascendancy, and how to chart its own course in having a say about the ways editing should be used and understood.

Terms of the Trade

After consulting approximately ten different trade journals and a handful of manuals (typically for aspiring scriptwriters),[2] we found that instances of "editing" being mentioned by name increased significantly after 1915 (Fig. 1). Up until that year, in the period from 1911 to 1915, references to editing tended to hover around 20 to 50 mentions per year. But starting in 1916, one sees a dramatic jump, nearly tripling in that year, and going up more than 50 again the following year. *Motion Picture News*, which began publishing in 1913, played a large role in this aggregate spike (56 mentions of "editing" in 1916 and 86 in 1917); however, *Moving Picture World*, a

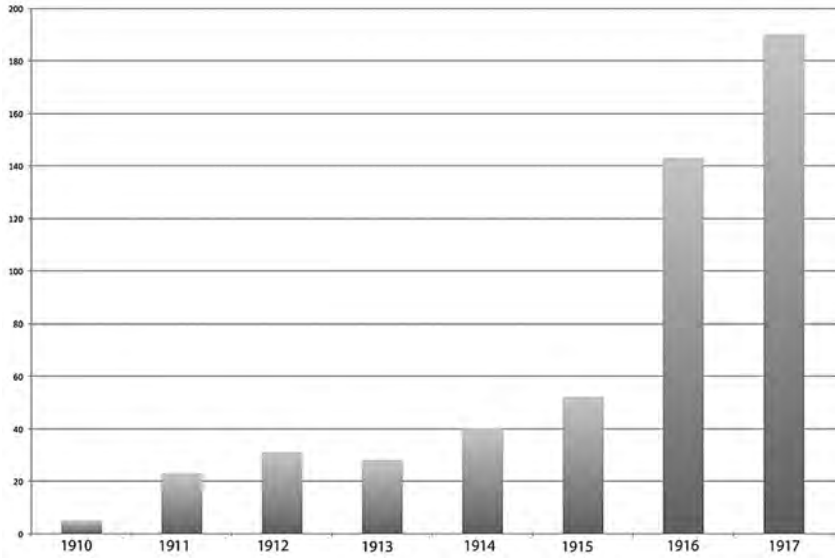

Figure 1. "Editing" in trade journals, 1910-17.

stalwart publication throughout the period, offers a more consistent increase through the war years (17 in 1914, 30 in 1915, 38 in 1916, 43 in 1917) (Fig. 2). We should insert one cautionary note here: "editing" can also refer to "scenario editing." But that semantic blending possesses its own pertinence, for at least two reasons. First, what happens at the level of scriptwriting seems to dictate the idea of what editing entails as much as what occurs in post-production. In both instances, one is considering how to truncate material, rendering it more concise, and, ideally, more compelling. Second, scripts themselves often issued a call for some form of editing in the instructions that they provided; at the very least, they might structure themselves with an eye to having their storytelling approach conveyed through different forms of editing, such as crosscutting. So, given the interrelationship of editing as it occurred on the page and editing as it was enacted on the screen, one of the tasks of trade press writers during this time was to disentangle these two forms of editing and strive to render each distinct. In part, this occurred by identifying with greater emphasis the role of the director (and/or producer), whom commentators identified as helping to decide how to implement editing at the post-production stage. This more precise identification of the director function (and the attendant

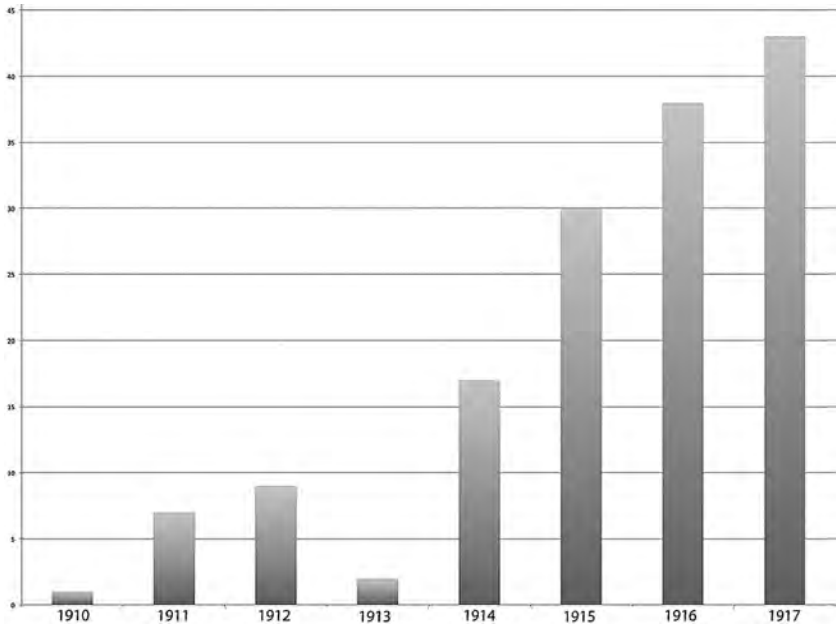

Figure 2. "Editing" in *Moving Picture World*, 1910-17

division of labour that would see various aspects of the task of editing further delineated) contributes to the institutionalization of cinema, insofar as granting a certain autonomy to the director suggests the artistic ambitions of the medium, which help it accrue increased cultural capital (Keil 2017).

But when trade press writers mentioned editing, what did they call it? As we might expect, they employed the terms "cutting," "pruning," "assembling," and, of course, "editing." Of more interest, perhaps, are the terms used to designate particular forms of editing, such as "cut-back" and "flash." Caught in a game of catch-up, the first mention of "cut-back" in *Moving Picture World* is in a 1912 response to readers' inquiries, where the responding columnist admits:

> B.J.T. – You've got us on our back, yelling for help. We thought we knew about the wrinkles of picture making, but the "cut back" style of direction is something new to us. Give the name of the company and we'll entreat them to wise up, and we'll tell you, but meantime, we have to confess we never met that particular style of production. We know what the cut back salary

> list is, but we take it that this is something newer than that. ("Inquiries" 1912)

The blind spot is short-lived. Within the year, the term is mobilized in the pages of both trades and writing manuals (Wright 1913; Sargent 1913, 90-97; Esenwein and Leeds 1913, 131-34), and, by 1915, a similar reader question receives a succinct response: "The term 'cut-back' means that a scene has been divided and that its action is separated by another scene. When the other scene has been completed we 'cut back' to the interrupted scene" (Caine 1915a). "Cut back" seems designed to refer to what we now call crosscutting, where the cutting back (and forth) assumes a primarily spatial function, alternating between two distinct zones of diegetic action. But it also seems intended to describe cutting across a temporal divide, as in a flashback. This somewhat confusing terminological indeterminacy indicates either that writers had not yet settled on how to identify what were emerging as primary functions of editing, or that they could not always distinguish completely between the temporal and spatial dimensions of editing. To add to the confusion, some writers also labelled the "cut back" the "return." In his book *The Photodrama*, for example, Henry Albert Phillips objects to the suggestion of "going back" in "cut-back," only to settle on the equally suggestive "the Return," "as we shall hereafter designate it" (1914, 140).[3]

The use of "flash" points to a different issue, which is the attempt to describe an effect of editing that hadn't yet been codified to any degree. "Flash" seems to indicate a particularly brief shot, such that it only remains on screen long enough to provide a "flash" of imagery. Epes Winthrop Sargent looks to clarify the use of the term in the expanded and updated third edition of *Technique of the Photoplay*: "Strictly speaking," Sargent affirms, a flash "is a very brief scene," no more than "about three seconds" (1916b, 182). Elsewhere he describes "flash scenes" of "not more than a second or two" (1913, 16) and as short as "six frames"—what he calls "a monstrosity rather than a flash" (1916b, 182). But "flash" also indicates a type of apparently self-conscious continuity, as when a commentator points out its deployment in *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914), saying that "the 'flash' and 'cut-back' are also made good use of in this comedy, as when one person pushes another, and we are then suddenly shown

the next scene where the person lands into a crowd of policemen or other bystanders and knocks them into a heap or into the water" ("Musings of the Photoplay Philosopher" 1915, 107). In this case, the "flash" and "cut-back" are conflated, in text and description: the combined meaning of the two terms suggests a simple match-on-action that signals both a spatial relation and comedic effect. With little designation beyond limited length, the "flash" is regularly muddled with the "cut-back." In fact, Sargent entitles a chapter "Cut-backs and Flashes" and summarizes that, particularly when heightening a situation through contrasting action or raising suspense through delaying the climax, "generally the 'cut-back' . . . is merely a flash" (1916b, 182). Or, inversely, in *How to Write Photo Plays*, Clarence J. Caine explains "flash" scenes to his audience of would-be writers as inserted "regular scenes which require only a few feet—as in the cut-back—[and] would be described the same way" (1915b, 257). To make matters less clear, Caine's favoured example of a "flash" (from an imagined film) describes a close-up of a letter being written in a previous scene whose significance is now about to become clear; in this case, a "flash" and "cut-back" may be etymologically fused in our purview as "flash-back."

By 1916, a film such as Vitagraph's *The Blue Envelope Mystery*, which is structured as a visualization of a bride's telling of past events, is identified in *Variety* as utilizing "a flash-back of the episodes leading up to her marriage" ("The Blue Envelope Mystery" 1916). Elsewhere, however, "flash-back" is used interchangeably with "cut-back," devoid of the temporal distinction. *Motion Picture News*, for example, when describing the novel influence of picture cutting on the New York stage production of *Under Cover*, invoked the term "flash-back" to describe the play's climax, employing what it called "motion picture parlance" ("The Eastern Studios" 1916). The performed action occurred on two floors of a house, which were alternated through curtain "cuts," and made concurrent through the use of an ongoing alarm sound. Terminological distinction is all but annihilated by Caine, who tells readers of *Picture-Play Magazine* quite simply that "'flash-back' is another name for the 'cut-back'" (1916). The depiction of parallel lines of action—particularly in films by Griffith—invited the appellation of "switch-back." And the insert of a chronological break was commonly called "the vision." The principal use of the

vision, Sargent explains, "is to recall some past action or to explain some action from the past not already shown. They may also be employed to picture the thoughts of some person, whether these thoughts refer to the past or a dream of the future" (1916b, 202). Others defined the "vision insert" exclusively as a visual expression of character psychological development through "the more subtle mental processes of thought and fantasy—such as reflection, introspection, dreams and hallucination" (Phillips 1914, 61). As a technical practice, the bounds of what is called a "vision" also vary, from a complete insert sequence using dissolves (the "fade vision"), to a picture-in-picture double exposure or double printing (the "straight vision" or "true vision") to, because of its connection to the subjective and the use of matte photography, the optical point-of-view insert, a field inclusive of the keyhole, telescope, or binocular view. If this sounds confusing, we have made our point. One gets a sense of the uncertain glossaries and polymorphous definitions as the trade press and practical handbook authors contend with novel editing forms becoming trans-textual norms. Overcoming imprecision, however, is predominantly expressed as dependent on the effectual narrative deployment of such techniques by scenarists and manufacturers. As industrial commentary and how-to writings endeavoured to outline and codify functions of editing protocols, these devices were then increasingly linked to the sustenance of a story's flow, as when *Pictures and the Picturegoer* refers to the cut-back as "alternating continuity" ("How to Write a Picture Play" 1915).

Proper Cutting

At this stage in cinema's development, no consensus existed regarding editing's roles in fostering narrative continuity. Commentators seemed split on the cut-back, with some praising films that used it with skill, while others chastised filmmakers for relying on it excessively. Caine, for example, calls the cut-back "a blessing and a curse" (1915b, 261). Viewed by many as too easily misused, the "cut-back system" could threaten to "spoil the play" (Sargent 1915, 644), and, as *Picture-Play Weekly* reported, it "had numerous enemies" who declared that imitators of the Biograph company "would ruin the business!" (Grau 1915, 29). Interestingly, at least one reviewer, writing about an adaptation of *Hedda Gabler*

(1917), comments that "practically all angles of the story get exposition on the screen, ofttimes, however, at the sacrifice of continuity through the enforced explanatory cut-back scenes that the picturizing calls for" (McGrath 1917). In this instance, the cut-back is critiqued precisely because it *endangers* proper continuity. Many commentators claim audiences are "confused by the cut-back" ("Pertinent Pointers" 1913), and caution writers and manufacturers to be careful "that the sequence is not destroyed and the audience not left at sea" (Caine 1915c). Such concerns stretched to include "the flash-back" or "the vision," when each registered a temporal reordering of scenes and inserts as "detached incidents." While one review of Essanay's *According to the Code* (1916) and its "peculiar" method of telling its story through "flash-back pictures" suggested "following the story has something of the fascination of putting together a puzzle picture" (Harris 1916), Sargent advised that to avoid intrusion and maintain forward continuity, "the photoplay should move in chronological order" (Sargent 1916b, 203).

Certainly, trade press writers were becoming increasingly devoted to the idea of technique serving storytelling during this period, with many expressing the view that individual devices had to become subservient to an overarching narrational program. As long as devices like the cut-back were used judiciously to achieve storytelling proficiency—as a "means to an end," as one commentator put it—then they received approval. Sargent summarizes this attitude when he pronounces that "the cut-back, the close-up, the dissolve, the vision and all old and some new tricks will be used, but they will be used intelligently to further advance the story" (1917, 370). Or, as film executive Fred Balshofer was quoted as saying in *Motography*: "Proper cutting of pictures is just as essential as good stories, photography or casts. No matter how good a story is, if it fails to contain simplified continuity and if the chief characters are not brought in front of the audience often enough[,] you are just as far from having a successful photoplay as though you were dealing with a poorly constructed theme. On the other hand, you can improve the quality of a poor story with good cutting" ("Three Leading Men in One Metro Play" 1916).

Such pronouncements emerged in a context where the threat of improper editing determined the redemptive possibilities of

expert cutting. A new service market was created with businesses such as Roskam Film Hospital promising to take pictures with "poor construction, weak titling, dragginess, lack of continuity and poor photography" and subsequently project, cut, title, reconstruct, and re-edit these faltering films until they could be issued a clean bill of health ("Roskam improves Films for Release" 1915). Opened by Eddie Roskam in October 1915, Roskam Film Hospital operated out of the tenth floor of the Candler Building on West 42nd Street, where Roskam, an established laboratory manager (and future head editor at Universal) known for quality, personally edited productions for various clients, from Metro Pictures to the California Motion Picture Corporation. Roskam's advertisements in *Motion Picture News* and *Moving Picture World* emphasized trained expertise, promising "proper" film editing and titling and offering the motto "Bad Films Made Good, Good Films Made Better" (Fig. 3).

Taking into account these measures of quality and appropriate practice, the trade press was both reflecting what it could discern—the film industry's accelerated reliance on a set of editing procedures—and attempting to prescribe the preferred use of such procedures. While the press could not dictate how editing developed during this time, it could comment on those developments, and the discourse on editing, as we mentioned earlier, indicates the uncertainty concerning editing's ultimate role in cinema's developing representational system. Further complicating any coherent conceptualization of editing was the fact that it derived from practices established in numerous other media and institutions. Here, if we return to the issue of terminology, a notion of the multi-faceted origins of editing becomes clearer. The abundance of names for

Figure 3. Roskam Film Hospital ads.

editing speaks to separate etymological lines leading back to distinct points of origin: "pruning" relates to theatrical practice, specifically, as often used in *Variety*, to excising elements of the music hall act or program; "assembling" points to industrial production, paired with such terms as film "factory," "plant," "machinery," and "operators"; and "editing" derives from print periodicals and journalism.[4] Each of these terms, in its use, represents shifting paradigms of thought about the nature of what we now, retrospectively, characterize as "film editing," though the process of synthesizing these meanings into a single recognizable term entailed years of discursive testing.

Fit to Print

The manner in which the trade press treated editing indicates that we might wish to reformulate historiographical conceptions about how transitional-era editing signals a key break from the heritage of earlier cultural forms (especially those typically viewed as "non-cinematic"). The opposite might be true, at least from the perspective of the dominant discourse. The trade press appeared to conceive the phenomenon of editing according to familiar models of reduction, selection, and organization. Following and slightly amending what Altman has suggested about changes to representational technologies, ideas about "film editing" seemingly developed in a context of pre-existent standards. The previously discussed confusion between scenario editing and editing in the realm of post-production proves this point: the confusion derives from the idea that "editing," more so than "cutting," "pruning," or "assembling," involved the shaping and reworking of material in a process akin to what journalistic editors executed. As one 1913 British report on "picture editors at work" explains to readers, "a film has to be edited in the same way that newspapers are edited" ("Blue Penciling the Film" 1913). The migration of the term such that it covered the work of different kinds of "cutters" may have been abetted by the fact that the journalistic analogy applied readily to non-fiction filmmaking: magazine-style short subjects (such as the Paramount-Burton Holmes "Travel-Pictures" or the *Wild Life of America in Films* series) and newsreels (*Pathé News*, *Selig-Tribune*, *Hearst-Vitagraph*) saw the work of shaping occur *after* filming was completed. In the case of newsreels,

fragmented film clips had to be transformed into coherent news stories and then groups of stories, so the work of editing there could be compared to what occurred in newspapers.

Frank E. Woods, in a column entitled "Editing a Motion Picture," makes the newspaper comparison explicit and extends it to picture editing more broadly: "The motion picture is a form of publication. It might well be called the celluloid press" (1917, 371). For Woods, the analogous labour process and mobile definition of editing was as direct a line as his career trajectory. He had made his start in journalism as contributor and then editor of the *New York Dramatic Mirror*. Woods' motion picture reviews led him to try his hand at submitting stories to Biograph and provided his first meeting with D.W. Griffith. In 1912, he quit as editor of the *Dramatic Mirror* and, after a short-lived directing stint at Kinemacolor, became a "scenario editor" at Biograph and then, sticking with Griffith, manager of the scenario department at Mutual. By the time Woods was writing columns for *Moving Picture World*, he was the head of Griffith's cutting department and the silent partner behind "the Griffith method" (see, for example, Cohn 1917). From newspaper editor to scenario editor to picture editor, Woods connects the latter role to each of the former functions and indicates in his column how the stages of "motion picture publishing" correspond to equivalent moments in the creation of a newspaper—a first assembly serves as "sample print" and cut film as "press proof." Sometimes, to the detriment of the finished product, Woods bemoans, "there may be little or no proofreading and the cutting and titling may be done by cheap and incompetent help, and not by experienced editors. . . . The finishing of a picture, the cutting and titling, has been, until quite lately, the most neglected branch of motion picture production" (1917, 371).

Recognizing the merits of the newspaper analogy and the assumed requirements of editorial skill in the construction of newsreels, their producers advertised key figures as "editing directors," whose shaping hands would assemble and guide each week's release. Newsreels had been produced and circulated by Pathé and Vitagraph since 1911, initially sold on being "animated," "complete," and providing the events themselves, in opposition to the "cold type" and "still pictures" of print's "illustrated periodicals and magazines" ("A Weekly Film of the World's Events" 1911). But with

a broadening and shifting competitive field of "news pictorials," public interest in the European war, and an ever-increasing spread of news-camera corps and offices, updated marketing strategies emphasized the logic and talent of newspaper editing. Hearst, Selig, and Pathé all advertised their editorial directors as print men with editing credentials: Ray Hall from United Press and International News Service; "Jack" Wheeler, formerly of *The New York World* and *The Washington Post*; and Eric Mayell from the *Pathé Gazette* in London. A greater emphasis was placed on "trained" newspapermen as competition further intensified when Hearst pushed the newsreel sector into "open booking," encouraging exhibitors to select their preferred news program. With the break-up of the *Hearst-Selig* newsreel in December 1915, Selig was forced into competing with its former partner. Selig forged a deal with the *Chicago Tribune*, promised the "greatest stars of the newspaper world," and presented Wheeler as an editor equivalent to Hearst's Hall (Fig. 4). *Moving Picture World*, often enamoured with Wheeler's additional secret service

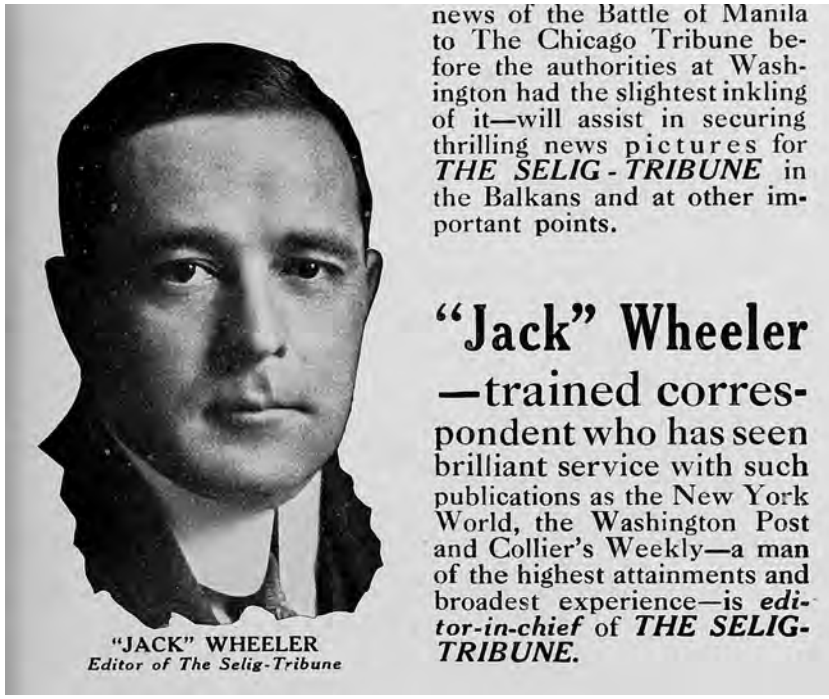

Figure 4. *Selig-Tribune* advertisement, 1915.

background, described him as working with "mathematical accuracy and with the speed of a whirlwind" in preparing the inaugural reels of *The Selig-Tribune* (McQuade 1916).

Alongside a remapping of newsreel competition, the war also brought new demands, expectations, and, with the U.S. entry into the Allied campaign, the *American War News Weekly* from the emergent Cinema War News Syndicate. Adopting the editor-mascot model, the *American War News Weekly* was sold on the authority of its "editing director," Capt. Robert R. Reynolds, "an amalgamation of soldier, author, journalist and outdoor sportsman," shaping the footage received from his "battery of cameraspondents" ("New War Film Syndicate" 1917). Like Burton Holmes, the "nationally known" travel name synonymous with "personally supervising" the editing and assembling of Paramount's travel pictures, Capt. Reynolds was made the face of the *War News Weekly*, cultivating a consciousness of his editorial command. F.W. Brooker, head of the Cinema War News Syndicate, believed the success of the weekly was in the brand of personality, promising exhibitors "a publicity campaign to further popularize Captain Reynolds" ("Brooker Head of War News Syndicate" 1917). Reynolds may have been marketed as an embodiment of military-journalistic authenticity, but his open approach to the news event emphasized reconstruction. He advocated for analytic editorial selection, variation, and brevity over the "amateur" submission of a complete event, filmed in both long shot and long take. Far from the rhetoric of the first Pathé newsreels claiming to record "things as they are," Reynolds castigated such "indifference," and championed short scenes ("20 to 30 feet") and interesting angles, sides, and action, where "novelty is the real acid test." His celebrity guest column in *Moving Picture World* directly refuted the old Pathé ad lines: "Don't think you are selling the event itself; remember, you are selling a photographic report of the event" (Reynolds 1917). The "professional" news-camera eye, Reynolds advised, aims for shooting short, multiple, and varied coverage for the benefit of the dynamic finishing cut. As the journalist must anticipate the copy editor, the news cameraspondent must shoot for the editing room. Reynolds concluded: "Try to see an event through the eyes of an editor. Don't be a crank turner; be a star reporter" (1917).

Jack Cohn, editing director of Universal's three news services, *The Animated Weekly*, *Current Events*, and *The Screen Magazine*, echoed Reynolds' view that a process of honed journalistic selection provided the material for incisive editorial storytelling. The challenge for Cohn, as the trades often mentioned, was taking the rotating contributions of "over 300 cameramen" and "getting them into a one[-]thousand[-]foot reel each week" ("Animated Weekly Circles Globe" 1914). While *Motography*—practically fusing the Pathé and Reynolds discourses—praised both the success of the camera corps' ability to capture events "just as they happen" and Cohn's "clever editing and brief, snappy titles" ("Importance of News Films" 1917), Cohn wrote that the relation must be a partnership in the service of a reduction chain:

> The cameraman who works for the newsreels now must have the instinct of the newspaperman. He must know what is worth taking and know how to seize the vital moment. And the newsreel director must have editorial "judgment." He must be able to sense the public's demands and the enterprise to get it for them. And, as with the editor of a big newspaper, his work is largely that of selection, the work of editing, the cutting out of many hundreds of feet of film to present the few hundreds the public see. ("War Quickens Public's News Sense" 1917)

The analogy between the work and value of newspaper copy and motion picture "editing" was ingrained in, but not limited to, the newsreel. When Hearst's International Film Service expanded into an exchange circuit and photodrama production house promising adventure serials, the Service also extended the custom of copy desk editorial. Hearst spokesman Edward A. MacManus defined the agenda of the International Film Service in terms of the company's print and news film standards: "the well[-]known Hearst principle of editing, refining and improving will be carried out here" ("Hearst Opens Exchanges" 1916). For their part, the film trades charted similar lines in the language of the "blue pencil," a borrowed symbol of print-copy editing. *Pathé's Animated Gazette* itself was sold on the BLUE PENCIL, two words stamped in capitalized bold lettering at the top of their ads to exhibitors, pledging "no mercy for duds" ("Pathé's Animated Gazette" [Advertisement] 1915). Converting the

term into a figurative act, trade writers treated it as a verb: to "blue pencil" a film stood in for any form of picture editing in reports on industry censors, program builders, and cutting departments.

Scribes and Surgeons

As we have seen, the terms editing and editor expanded from implying textual labour and the position of scenario reviser to a second, now more familiar, meaning of post-production montage. To varying degrees, the latter entailed "finding" the film through editorial processes of selection, experimentation, and refinement. In the incorporation of this second meaning, the term becomes paradoxical, pulling cinematic practice and its commentators in two directions. On the one hand, we find a prescriptive codification of formal patterns that are to be chosen, arranged, and properly denoted in *the edit of the script*. Prepared as the strictest blueprint, as commentator S.S. Hutchinson dictates, "by no means should a scenario be permitted to be altered as the production progresses" (1914). On the other hand, the expanded territory of film editing involved a loosening of obligations to both the pre-existent scenario map and inscription of suggested film cutting codes in favour of a renewed stage of the editing paradigm and the possibility of creative revision. While this might seem a self-evident summation of "film editing" from our vantage, reconciling and synthesizing the dialectic of editing points and processes entailed considerable friction during the transitional years of the mid-1910s. Along with Hutchinson, Sargent protested the "reconstruction" of pictures, based on his claim that studios edited "the originality out of all stories," debasing them to "familiar ingredients," and threatening to misuse the very techniques of the cut-back and close-up that were in the process of establishing the photoplay, in his view, as a distinct art (Sargent 1916a; Sargent 1917). Writers similarly complained that film cuts and revisions outside the scenario threatened the "co-ordination" of the picture. While, as we have been suggesting, the terminological paradigm and conceptualization of film editing migrated from print to film in these years, scenario writers distinguished their position from that of magazine authors: they protested that whereas print authors were informed of problematic passages and requested to make changes, the film writer had no

redress, placed at the mercy of the shears with "so many cuts . . . to the foot, regardless of fitness, unity, or continuity" ("The Rights of the Writers" 1916). Scenarists were positioned as the experts, qualified through experience to properly structure and bridge a picture.

As the editorial "neglect" that Woods bemoaned dissipated, both in terms of discernible practice and an increased attention to editing in the trade press, so, too was the dialectic between text and film editing slowly reconciled and synthesized. In the process, cinema ascended to a position of equivalence to those media with which it had previously been unfavourably compared. We can see this in Burr C. Cook's *Picture-Play Magazine* 1916 feature story on the "art of the film surgeon," which, like Eddie Roskam's Film Hospital and his pet press names of "Old Doc Roskam" and "the house physician," also linked the labour of "snipping" to another preconceived terrain: that of a medical practice. Written from the perspective that "there is one man in the moving picture business who never is talked about very much, but who plays almost as important a role in the final evolution of the film plays as the actors themselves, and the camera that takes the pictures," Cook's article introduces the studio film editors and the vital business—or art—they conduct. Pictured at work, along with Frank E. Woods, are Edgar Scott at Universal, A.D. Ripley at Fox, B.S. Dawley at Edison, U.S. Andrews at Thomas H. Ince (Fig. 5), E.L. McIntosh at Vitagraph, and Frank Meyers at Famous Players. These decapitators (a play on "head cutter") or, as Cook prefers, "film surgeons" are each credited with "amputating" upward from "thirty-five thousand feet of film a month," and making "Chinese puzzles" intelligible. But most importantly, editing is characterized by an integrated rationalization of orderly workflow and looseness of instinctive impulse. Cook details B.S. Dawley's invention, and the cross-studio adoption, of "the number system" (what we now term "slating"), and the coordination of number cards, trimming room racks, and scenario instructions. These rationalized practices, however, exist to be placed in the service of the "keen intelligence" of the film surgeon, capable of regaining failed gags "at least in part, by proper cutting," trimming leaping action into "a work of art," and re-ordering "plots of plays," even "almost entirely backwards," in one big studio example, if it might produce greater suspense.

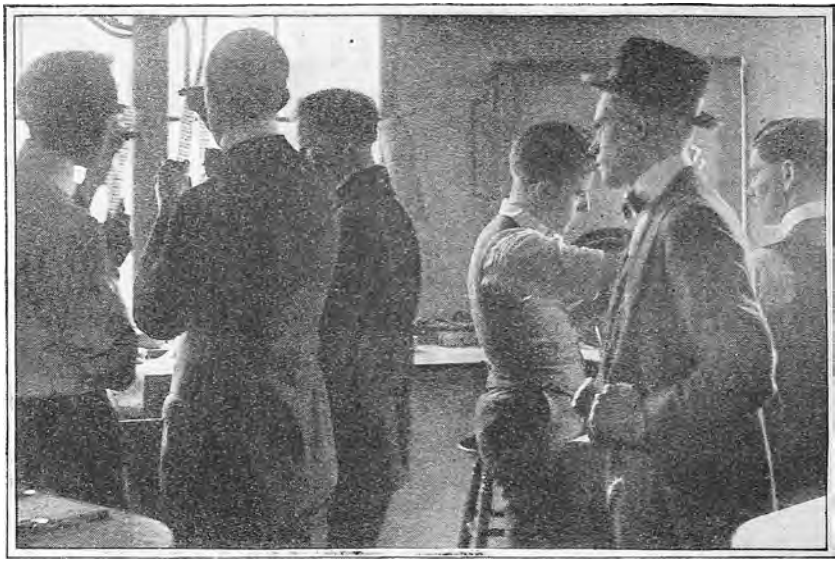

Figure 5. U.S. Andrews and assistants.

At the point of Cook's behind-the-curtain survey of the picture edit, one finds the trade press newly focusing on matters of shooting ratios and even directors' cuts. For example, one notes the extensive reporting of director Herbert Brenon's task of "boiling down" 220,000 feet of film into 10,000 for Fox's large-scale Annette Kellerman tropical feature *A Daughter of the Gods* (1916). Similarly, the press devotes considerable space to Charlie Chaplin's move into editing his own films with *Carmen* (1916), Essanay's rejection of Chaplin's reduced cut of this title, and the subsequent public feud and injunction forwarded by Chaplin to block Essanay's re-edited release of the film. By 1916-17, production news stories become increasingly caught up in who is in the cutting room and at what stage, as the filmmakers' names and the jurisdiction of film direction expand into the post-production edit. (Looking at the number of references to the "cutting room" across the trade papers examined, we can see how 1916-17 demonstrates a significant, if delayed, registering of interest in picture-editing coverage) (Fig. 6).

When editing serves as the arena for proving whether an artistic prerogative has been maintained, institutional status has been de facto conferred. But the struggle to understand and define editing's role, articulated for close to a decade in the pages of the trade press,

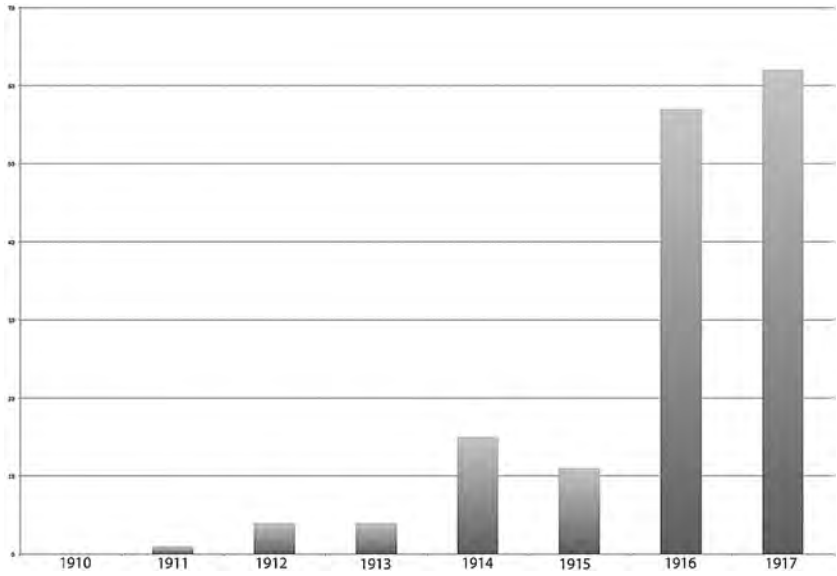

Figure 6. "Cutting Room" chart.

required its own constant cutting and revising. The historical focus on the codification of cutting models, particularly in the aftermath of Griffith, has come to serve as the shorthand summary of a drive to the practices of continuity and involved narrative editing which followed. But the development of editing techniques followed no such prescribed trajectory; instead, these techniques were developed and discussed *in opposition* to the text-derived paradigm of film editing as a post-production crafting process where films were shaped, versioned, and, finally, locked—the dominant idea of "editing" as we have come to know it. Even by 1917, key commentators such as Sargent targeted post-production editing for the way it lost elements of the plot, padded out stories, and emphasized undisciplined action. The cut-back and close-up, with all their potential, were to blame for annihilating space and time, overloading the number of scenes in a reel and inviting picture changes so rapid that it seemed "something [was] the matter with the projection." Stating in bold that there were "better plays five years ago," Sargent speculated that the "ultimate photoplay," when cutting "tricks" were reined in and writers respected, would be two reels for drama and half that for comedy (1917, 370). The five-reel feature, a product of editing developments, would be curbed and forgotten, he

proclaimed. As Sargent's predictions and closer examination of the transitional period will doubtless reveal, the process of institutionalization remained a conflicted process, resisting any quick resolution provided by a deftly inserted fade-out.

NOTES

1. This narrative has been informed by careful analysis of Griffith's contributions to the development of editing and the narrational implications of his achievements; for a pre-eminent example, see Gunning 1991, especially pp. 264-70.
2. The trade journals examined include *Film Fun*, *Motion Picture Magazine*, *Motion Picture News*, *Motography*, *Moving Picture News*, *Moving Picture World*, *New York Clipper*, *Pictures and the Picturegoer*, *Reel Life* and *Variety*. Also included are two well-known filmmaking handbooks: Epes Winthrop Sargent's *The Technique of the Photoplay* (1913) and Henry Albert Phillips' *The Photodrama* (1914). These research resources were examined extensively with an eye to locating and analyzing the varied and distinct uses of terms related to "editing."
3. As a side note, the "cut-back" also finds its way into the text of other public entertainment weeklies. Even further obscuring a clear understanding of the term, as one example from the established theatre paper the *San Francisco Dramatic Review* demonstrates, a description of the use of the "cut-back" in *Universal Ike Makes a Monkey of Himself* (1914) rather simply describes an in-scene reaction cut, suggesting the term is being used by some less savvy stage journalists as a catch-all for any "cutting" (Willis 1914).
4. For such use of "pruning" and "assembling," see, for example, "Rogers and Spencer Comedy Sketch" (1913), and "The Biograph Company's New Studio" (1913).

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RÉSUMÉ

Le montage et l'institutionnalisation du cinéma, 1913-1917

Nick Shaw et Charlie Keil

Comment imaginait-on le montage au cours de la période de transition, alors que le cinéma devient une institution? Dans quelle mesure la représentation du montage en tant que système formel sujet au changement que l'on trouve dans la presse spécialisée de l'époque correspondait-elle aux tendances qui apparaissent à l'écran? Les commentateurs avaient-ils remarqué les fonctions changeantes du montage? À quel point peut-on détecter une «conscience du montage» dans la presse spécialisée, et comment opérait-elle au cours des années cruciales de 1913 à 1917? Pour mieux répondre à ces questions, cet article examine la terminologie employée par les auteurs pour écrire au sujet du montage durant cette période, les avis qu'ils ont émis et les facteurs qui peuvent avoir influencé leurs conceptions du montage. Ces observations permettent de définir plus précisément la manière dont l'industrie s'est réconciliée avec l'ascension du montage et de réaffirmer les contours inégaux du processus d'institutionnalisation.